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INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE  
RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/06/2016  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [KPKO](#) [KDEM](#) [CG](#)  
SUBJECT: FARDC COMMANDER DIES SUDDENLY OF UNKNOWN CAUSES

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

1. (C) General Sylvain Buki, the deputy chief of the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC), died suddenly the evening of July 4 of unknown causes. According to military sources, Buki had reportedly been sick for the past two weeks with what was believed to be malaria and had been self-medicating for the illness. At approximately 5:00pm local time July 4, Buki collapsed in his office in Kinshasa and immediately fell into a coma. He was pronounced dead around 10:00pm the same evening.

2. (C) Buki's death produces several immediate effects, both political and military. First, Buki was the highest-ranking member of the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD) in the FARDC and a well-respected member of the party. Sources said RCD president Azarias Ruberwa is "crushed" by the loss of Buki. As such, Ruberwa has decided to postpone the official launch of his presidential campaign, which had been planned for July 5. (Note: The "official" start of the DRC's presidential and legislative campaign period was June 29. End note.) Ruberwa's decision will affect other RCD candidates as well, who must wait for Ruberwa to kick off his campaign before they can begin their own, unless Ruberwa himself gives permission to do otherwise. Ruberwa is currently expected to commence campaigning perhaps as early as July 8.

3. (C) Buki's passing also raises questions about who will succeed current FARDC chief General Kisempia. It is widely believed Buki was President Kabila's pick to succeed Kisempia after the July 30 elections and the installation of a new, post-transition government. No other high-ranking FARDC official currently shares the same degree of respect as did Buki, a necessary condition for any future FARDC commander who will have to make difficult decisions regarding security sector reform and military integration. Moreover, the lack of a clear successor to Buki returns the issue squarely back to Kabila, who will now have to address the ambitions of Air Force Chief of Staff General John Numbi, who is deemed an untrustworthy figure.

4. (C) Buki had also been in charge of the newly-established eastern military headquarters in Bukavu, a strategic position in the FARDC's command structure. It is far from clear whether this project -- which was not supported by the regional military commander based in (and subsequently supplanted from) Bukavu -- was begun as an Buki initiative or whether he was given charge of it. If the former, the eastern headquarters might simply, quietly, disappear. If the latter, a capable and competent commander will need to be identified to take control of the post. There is no clear candidate at present for this position.

5. (C) According to the division of governmental and military

posts laid out in the Sun City Accords, Buki's position should be filled by another member of the RCD since the GDRC is still operating under the rules of the transition period. The next highest ranking RCD official in the FARDC is General Malik, the current head of military logistics. Malik, however, is not a well-respected or trusted figure, either in the FARDC or the RCD.

¶6. (C) Comment: General Buki's death creates a large leadership void within the FARDC at an inopportune moment for the DRC. Buki was a professional soldier who had earned the respect of his military colleagues. Finding a capable and competent replacement will be a challenging task for the President, and could hamper needed military reform efforts. Buki's absence also creates an opportunity for less reliable and more troublesome FARDC commanders, such as Numbi and Malik, to consolidate their own power and possibly derail reforms. End comment.  
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